



File Code: 1950
Date: November 9, 2015

Dear Friends, Neighbors, and Interested Parties:

The U.S. Forest Service is initiating a public scoping period for a project to conduct vegetative management activities on National Forest System (NFS) lands across Southern Missouri. This letter is the initial stage of public involvement (scoping) in the environmental analysis process for the **Forest Health Initiative** project.

You are being contacted because you are either an adjacent neighbor to the Forest Health Initiative project area or have shown interest in activities on the Mark Twain National Forest (MTNF). The Forest Service conducts environmental analyses to assess the nature and importance of the physical, biological, social and economic effects of a proposed action and its reasonable alternatives. The process of scoping is an integral part of the environmental analysis.

Preliminary investigation via aerial detection flights and analysis of recent weather patterns indicate that areas of the MTNF subjected to drought events are experiencing various stages of oak decline and mortality.

This proposal is based on the need to harvest the Red oak group (red oak, black oak, scarlet oak) and White oak in specific areas before it dies. Some oak sprouting occurs by cutting trees before they die. Since dead oak stumps do not stump sprout, the dead oaks may be replaced by mixed species not necessarily of oak (including suppressed trees from the understory). The composition of the remaining species would depend on numerous variables. This could result in a shortage of the Red oak group and White oak in the future.

A detailed description of the Proposed Action and how you can comment is included in the **Forest Health Initiative Project Scoping Report**. Interested parties can view a copy of this, and other supporting documents, including maps, as well as, be able to follow the progress of the project on the Mark Twain National Forest Website at: www.fs.usda.gov/goto/mtnf/projects; then scroll down to the Forest Health Initiative project.

The Forest Health Initiative project is situated solely on Federal lands administered by the MTNF across multiple counties in Missouri. The analysis area totals approximately 943,982 acres of which, 566,071 acres are NFS lands and of these, 46,475 acres are proposed for treatment.

Also, within this project area boundary are 377,910 acres of private lands. *Private lands are mentioned in this project because the environmental effects of activities on private ownerships are used in our cumulative effects analysis. This project does not direct private landowners, within the project area, any different way of managing their lands than how they currently manage them. Private landowners are not required to respond to this mailing.*



The legal description for the Forest Health Initiative project area is:

- Salem and Potosi Ranger Districts: T33N, R3W; T33N, R2W; T34N, R2W; T32N, R3W;
- Willow Springs Ranger District: T27N, R10W; T26N, R10W; T26N, R11W; T25N, R11W;
- Eleven Point Ranger District: T23N, Ranges 2W, 1W, 1E, 2E; T24N, Ranges 3W, 2W, 1W, 1E, 2E; T25N, Ranges 5W, 4W, 3W, 2W, 1W, 1E; T26N, Ranges 5W, 4W, 3W, 1W; T27N, Ranges 4W, 3W;
- Poplar Bluff Ranger District: T25N, Ranges 6E; 7E; T26N, Ranges 7E, 6E, 4E; T27N, Ranges 3E, 4E, 6E; T28N, Ranges 4E and 5E; Fifth Principal Meridian.

A vicinity map of these areas is enclosed.

Benefits associated with this project include: enhanced forest health, improved wildlife habitat, reduced susceptibility to insects and disease, identification and protection of historic properties, improved scenic quality, improved safety for forest visitors, and a long-term reduction of heavy fuel loads.

I am seeking **written** comments on this project proposal that includes a range of landscape scale timber management activities, and look forward to hearing from you. Local knowledge and history of the area helps us build a sound environmental analysis. Your comments will be considered as we proceed with the environmental analysis and they will help us refine our Proposed Action where necessary. Once comments are received by the Interdisciplinary Team (ID Team), we will use these comments to identify issues and if necessary, develop alternatives to the Forest Health Initiative Proposed Action. The ID Team will then analyze the environmental effects of the different alternatives, including no action. Prior to the final decision, I, the Responsible Official, will send our Alternatives for 30-day review to those who have shown interest by commenting on this proposal.

This proposed project is subject to a pre-decisional objection process described in 36 CFR 218, subparts A and B. Only those individuals or entities who submitted **timely, specific written comments** regarding this proposal during this scoping period, or the official 30 day comment period for this project, may file an objection.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record of this proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who submit anonymous comments will not have standing to file an objection under 36 CFR 218, subparts A and B.

The Forest Health Initiative project decision is not one of land allocation, nor is the analysis intended to look at every possible combination of activities. The scope of the decision will be confined to a reasonable range of alternatives that will meet the Forest Health Initiative Project Purpose and Need.

In submitting comments, please be as specific as possible to the proposals in the Scoping Report and help us by identifying the rationale behind your comments. Comments pertaining to the activities identified and their locations in the Scoping Report will be most helpful. Please submit your comments by December 14, 2015. If we do not hear from you by this date, we will remove you from this project's mailing list.

In the meantime, if you have any questions, need additional site specific information on this project, or prefer the documents on the website in a hard copy format, please contact Integrated Resource Analyst - Forest Health Initiative Interdisciplinary Team Leader Mark Hamel at (573) 341-7443.

Sincerely,



WILLIAM B. NIGHTINGALE
Forest Supervisor

Enclosure

cc:
Mark Hamel